

Message Text

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51

ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 OES-03 AGR-05 EB-07 COME-00

TRSE-00 OMB-01 CIEP-01 AID-05 IO-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00

INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 RSC-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8018

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAGR, TS

SUBJ: EFFECT OF DRY SPELL ON TUNISIA: PRELIMINARY
ASSESSMENT

REF: ALGIERS 156

1. DESPITE LIGHT SCATTERED RAINFALL IN RECENT DAYS,
UNUSUALLY DRY CONDITIONS SINCE GOOD RAINS IN EARLY
NOVEMBER MAKE IT UNLIKELY THAT EXPECTATIONS FOR ABOVE-
AVERAGE 1974-75 CEREALS HARVEST IN TUNISIA WILL BE
REALIZED. SEVERAL SOURCES, INCLUDING USAID AGRICULTURAL
SPECIALISTS AND OTHER FOREIGN EXPERTS WORKING WITH
TUNISIAN FARMERS, REPORT THAT DRY PERIOD HAS ALREADY
REDUCED ANTICIPATED CEREALS CROP BY APPROXIMATELY
20-30 PER CENT. ON THIS BASIS, TUNISIAN MIN PLAN
ORIGINAL ESTIMATES OF 1.2 MILLION MT FOR 1974-75 SHOULD
BE REDUCED TO SLIGHTLY BELOW 1 MILLION MT ON IMPORTANT
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ASSUMPTION OF NORMAL RAINFALL FOR REST OF CROP YEAR.

2. RELATIVE LOSS WILL BE PARTICULARLY ACUTE IN CENTRAL AND SOUTH TUNISIA WHERE MANY FIELDS NOT SEEDED DUE TO DRY SOIL AND SEEDED AREAS ALREADY SERIOUSLY AFFECTED BY DROUGHT. FORTUNATELY, MOST CEREALS ARE GROWN IN NORTH WHERE LATE WINTER AND SPRING RAINS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN EARLY WINTER RAIN. HOWEVER, MANY FARMERS WERE UNABLE TO COMPLETE SEEDING BECAUSE OF LACK OF RAINS. MIN AGRICULTURE EXPERTS SAY THAT IF ADDITIONAL RAINS DO NOT FALL IN NEXT WEEK OR SO IN NORTH, LOSS WILL BE EVEN GREATER THAN INDICATED PARA ONE.

3. DESPITE WIDESPREAD OBSERVATIONS OF IMPACT OF EXTENDED DRY PERIOD, TUNISIAN PRESS HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY SILENT ON SUBJECT. ONE NEWSPAPER ARTICLE, DATED JAN 17, CONTENDS THAT CUMULATIVE RAINFALL HAD BEEN COMPLETELY NORMAL UP TO THAT TIME (IGNORING FACT THAT ALMOST ALL RAIN FELL EARLY IN SEASON). IN RESPONSE TO EMBOFF QUESTIONS, GOT OFFICIAL CITED DANGER OF DISRUPTIVE SPECULATION AS REASON FOR DOWNPLAYING DRY SPELL IN PUBLIC. ANOTHER LIKELY REASON, ALTHOUGH NEVER EXPRESSED BY GOT OFFICIALS, IS UNWILLINGNESS TO SUGGEST THAT ROSY ECONOMIC PICTURE ASSOCIATED WITH NOUIRA PERIOD MAY BE DISTURBED BY BAD AGRICULTURAL YEAR. SOME PRIVATE TUNISIANS BEGINNING TO REFER TO SIX-YEAR CYCLES, NOTING THAT SIX CONSECUTIVE BAD YEARS DURING BEN SALAH PERIOD FOLLOWED BY THE SIX GOOD YEARS UNDER NOUIRA MAY BE FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER CYCLE OF BAD WEATHER.

4. COMMENT: CROP DAMAGE TO DATE WILL CERTAINLY REQUIRE CEREAL IMPORTS TO INCREASE OVER 1974 LEVEL AND PROBABLY INCREASE 1975 TRADE DEFICIT BY LARGE BUT, SO FAR, NOT CRITICAL EXTENT. THIS EARLY JUDGMENT SUBJECT TO MAJOR NEGATIVE REVISION IF DRY SPELL CONTINUES OR TO MORE OPTIMISTIC PROJECTION IF RAINS FOR REST OF SEASON ARE ABOVE NORMAL.
SEELYE

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